

In this week's *Türkiye in Focus*:

- The controversy surrounding Ekrem İmamoğlu's arrest in the corruption case persists.
- The CHP faces a growing internal divide following Ekrem İmamoğlu's arrest.
- Researcher Şeymanur Yönt assessed the Turkish economy in response to the United States' new tariff policies.

İmamoğlu's Arrest Continues to Fuel National Debate

The arrest of İstanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu remains a significant topic on the national agenda. Opposition political parties have raised concerns that the decision could be politically motivated, despite the legal proceedings against him appearing to be substantial.

In this context, the CHP held rallies before the İstanbul municipality building every evening until last Tuesday. Various protest actions were also organised in other cities. On Wednesday March 26, the municipal council elected CHP member Nuri Aslan, İmamoğlu's deputy, as the new mayor.

Conversely, government sources assert that the judiciary is not engaged in a politically driven process. In this intense discussion, it can be said that the country is undergoing a new wave of polarisation.

What is new, however, is that such polarisation appears to extend beyond traditional political divides. Within the opposition, the pro-Kurdish DEM Party has expressed political solidarity with the CHP. However, there has been backlash from DEM Party supporters in response to nationalist messages from the CHP. One notable incident from the past week was the booing of a message sent by CHP leader Özgür Özel to the DEM Party's Nevruz celebrations in İstanbul.



(Murat Şengül - Anadolu Agency)

Another fault line is generational. A striking aspect of the protests has been the dominant presence of young participants. The political discourse of the younger generation contrasts sharply with that of the older generations shaping CHP policies, and the party leadership seems to struggle in effectively engaging with them. This phenomenon may become a significant topic in future discussions on CHP's abilities and Türkiye's social dynamics.

CHP's İmamoğlu Crisis

Ekrem İmamoğlu was considered the CHP's likely presidential candidate. Another potential candidate was Ankara's Mayor Mansur Yavaş. However, İmamoğlu was known to be more influential within the party and ahead of Yavaş in terms of support. In the presidential candidate selection primary held on March 23, İmamoğlu was the sole candidate. Although Yavaş backed this process in reaction to the legal case against İmamoğlu, he had previously expressed that such a nomination method was premature and misguided.

If İmamoğlu cannot run, his absence will likely disrupt the party's internal balance. This crisis is also directly linked to the party's electoral strategy. Undoubtedly, Yavaş is the second



(Beyza Cömert - Anadolu Agency)

most popular figure in the CHP after İmamoğlu. However, he comes from a nationalist background and openly highlights it in his speeches, which has upset Kurdish constituencies and hard-left voters. It is unclear whether this stance is fully accepted within the party's traditional base and organisation.

On one side of the equation is the younger generation, which has largely embraced far-right rhetoric and has been the dominant force in the protests. On the flip side, the CHP's traditional voter base can be categorised as consisting of left-wing and Kurdish voters. In this context, Yavaş's comparison in a protest speech—where he contrasted a police officer in Şırnak handing out cotton candy to children at a Nevruz celebration with the strict police response against CHP demonstrations—provoked a strong backlash from the Kurdish community.

However, at CHP protests, banners reflecting support for Yavaş's rhetoric were notably present among the younger protesters. Some experts argue that Yavaş deliberately engages with this emerging nationalist wave to gain traction. Others speculate that he may consider running for president independently if the CHP does not nominate him.

The leadership of CHP Chairman Özgür Özel will play a pivotal role in determining the party's direction. The party's political rhetoric and candidate selection will directly influence each other. Despite the unity shown in defence of İmamoğlu, internal divisions—such as the example mentioned above—are already apparent. In the coming months, it will become clearer how these fractures will shape the party's future.

Türkiye and the Evolving U.S. Trade Landscape

Researcher Şeymanur Yönt evaluated the U.S. tariff decisions in the context of the Turkish economy.

The shifting landscape of U.S. trade policy, marked by rising protectionism and strategic tech restrictions, poses both direct and indirect challenges for Türkiye. While Washington's actions primarily target economic rivals, allies are not exempt from tariffs and regulatory scrutiny. That's why Türkiye must anticipate disruptions in supply chains, higher input costs, and potential restrictions on key industries such as steel, defence, and technology. As a response, rather than reacting to these uncertainties, Türkiye should adopt a proactive, scenario-based approach—diversifying trade relations, strengthening ties with the EU, investing in innovation, and securing strategic exemptions where possible.

To navigate these challenges, Türkiye must prioritise economic resilience through industrial policy, technological self-sufficiency, and stronger regional alliances. By enhancing its position in global supply chains and aligning regulatory frameworks with key trade partners, Türkiye can turn risks into



(Mustafa Çiftçi - Anadolu Agency)

opportunities. In an era of trade wars and shifting economic alliances, long-term adaptability and strategic foresight will be essential to maintaining economic stability and competitiveness.

Highlights

- PhD student Rümeysa Öztürk, who is legally residing in the U.S., was detained in a manner resembling an abduction by masked ICE officers following her criticism of Israel, sparking widespread backlash in both the U.S. and Türkiye. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that they are addressing the issue.
- Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan met with U.S. Secretary of State Marc Rubio in Washington. In addition to discussions on lifting CAATSA sanctions and rejoining the F-35 program, regional cooperation—particularly concerning Syria and Ukraine—was expected to be on the agenda.
- Türkiye's defense giant Aselsan is set to lead Saudi Arabia's 'Iron Dome' project, enhancing the Kingdom's air defense capabilities. Reports from French intelligence magazine Intelligence Online suggest that Aselsan will replace European missile manufacturer MBDA in providing the air defense system for Saudi Arabia's NEOM desert project. The Steel Dome, developed by Aselsan and other leading Turkish defense companies, is a multi-layered system designed to intercept various aerial threats.

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No Edition Next Week

Due to the official public holidays declared in Türkiye for Eid al-Fitr next week, Türkiye in Focus will not be with you. We'll return the following week with fresh perspectives and updates on the latest developments in Türkiye. Thank you for your ongoing support and understanding!

The *Türkiye in Focus* Team